

BRIEFLY

Israel, PLO to resume talks Dec 5:

Israel and the PLO will resume talks on extending Palestinian autonomy on December 5 in Cairo, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said on Monday after meeting PLO chairman Yasser Arafat in Brussels. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Ghali visits Sarajevo today:

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali plans to visit the Bosnian capital Sarajevo on Wednesday, UN sources told Reuters on Monday in Sarajevo.

8 Filipino soldiers killed:

Eight members of a military unit who went missing after a clash with Muslim fundamentalists in a southern Philippine island have been found dead in the area, a military official said yesterday. AFP reports from Zamboanga.

Ethiopians demand Islamic law:

Over 30,000 Ethiopian Muslims demonstrated in Addis Ababa yesterday demanding Islamic law, Xinhua reports from Addis Ababa.

IAEA team leaves Pyongyang:

A team of officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency left Pyongyang on Tuesday after wrapping up the first round of talks on freezing North Korea's nuclear programme, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported, AP says from Beijing.

Belarus to join NATO programme:

Belarus' Security Council decided in a closed session on Monday evening to join NATO's "Partnership for Peace" programme for former East bloc countries, television news in Minsk reported, AP says from Minsk.

Japanese meet on gun control:

Alarmed by a heavily publicised wave of shootings, Japan's Cabinet held its first special meeting on gun control on Tuesday and agree to strengthen immigration checks for illegal weapons, AP reports from Tokyo.

Videotape of Escobar's death:

Nearly a year after security forces killed drug kingpin Pablo Escobar at his hideout in Medellin, Colombia, a videotape of the raid has surfaced a news magazine reported on Monday, AP reports from Bogota.

Namibian polls next week:

Namibia, a former German colony and South African protectorate that emerged from bush warfare to become one of Africa's successful states, holds its first election as a free nation next week, AP reports from Windhoek.

Remains of US MIAs returned:

A US military honour guard on Tuesday solemnly escorted home what are believed to be the remains of six to nine American servicemen killed in the Vietnam War, AP reports from Hanoi.

Heavy snowfalls in Tibet:

Some 3,800 people and 110,000 head of livestock are threatened with starvation following unusually heavy snowfalls in the remote Himalayan region of Tibet, an official report said on Tuesday, AP reports from Beijing.

Giza highway work suspended:

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has suspended work on a controversial highway cutting across the Giza pyramids plateau while a study to assess its impact on the ancient monuments is conducted, newspapers said on Monday, Reuters reports from Cairo.

10 die in Chinese mine blast:

Ten miners were killed in an explosion at a coal-mine in Jiangsu province, east China, on Thursday, the Jiangsu Daily reported, AFP says from Beijing.

Belarus Trade Minister sacked:

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has sacked Trade Minister Valentin Baidak for corruption, the Interfax news agency reported yesterday quoting the president's office, AFP reports from Moscow.

Thai road mishap claims 5:

Five European tourists were killed and two seriously injured late on Monday when a van in which they were travelling overturned in northern Thailand, police and hospital officials said yesterday, Reuters reports from Bangkok.

Major saved from humiliating parliamentary defeat

LONDON, Nov 29: Prime Minister John Major was saved from humiliating defeat and a snap election by winning a key vote on Europe, but his parliamentary majority disappeared after a revolt by right-wingers in his Conservative Party reports Reuter.

Major hoped Finance Minister Kenneth Clarke could restore morale in his divided party by dangling the prospect of tax cuts in Tuesday's annual budget.

Chechnya rejects Russian ultimatum to lay down arms

GROZNY, Russia, Nov 29: The secessionist government in Russia's embattled Chechnya Republic rejected a Kremlin ultimatum to lay down arms, vowing to fight "to the last drop of blood," a Chechen official said, reports AFP.

"We will fight until the last drop of blood. Chechnya will never return to Russia," Chechnya's Foreign Minister Yusef Shamsedin said in a statement to journalists.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin gave all parties 48 hours, early today, to declare a ceasefire and lay down arms or he would deploy troops in the breakaway oil-rich Caucasus Republic.

Meanwhile AP from Moscow adds: Yeltsin's warning fol-

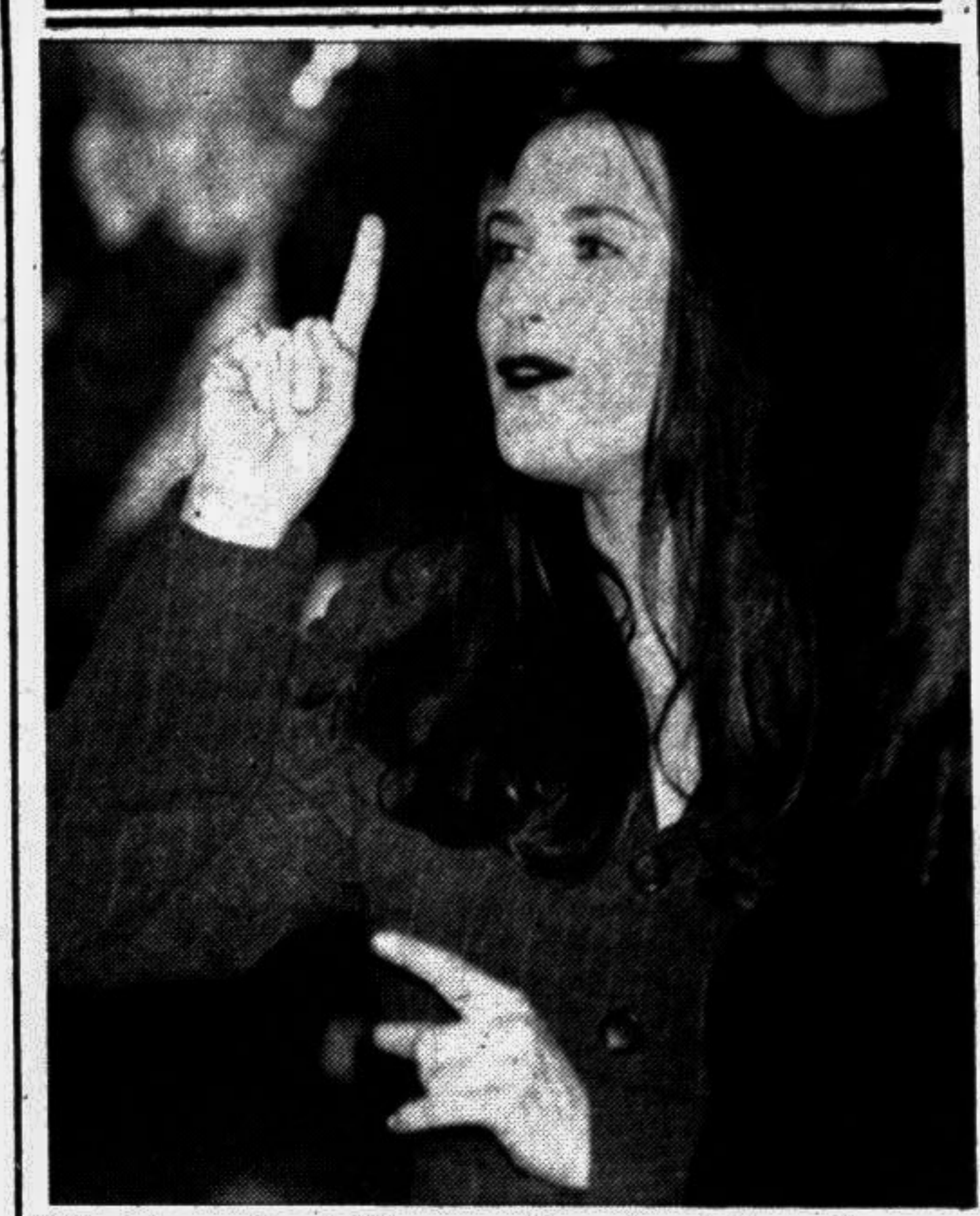
lowed intense fighting over the weekend and threats by the president of Chechnya, Dzhokhar Dudayev, to execute about 70 captured Russians. Dudayev later said the Russians would be treated as prisoners of war.

Yeltsin, citing "an extreme danger to stability and peace in our society," demanded that all prisoners be released and that both sides disband all armed formations within 48 hours.

Yeltsin said that unless his demands are met, he will declare a state of emergency in Chechnya, a mostly Muslim republic of 1.2 million people located in southern Russia.

"All forces and resources which are at the disposal of the state will be used to put an

Off the Record



US actress Demi Moore motions to photographers on Monday as she arrives at premiere of the movie "Disclosure" in Los Angeles. Moore stars in the corporate thriller as a boss who sexually harasses an employee, played by Michael Douglas. — AFP photo

'Tsar must be buried before Lenin'

MOSCOW, Nov 29: First the Tsar's family must be buried, and then Russia can decide whether to bury Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin, President Boris Yeltsin's chief of staff said Monday, reports AP.

Sergei Filatov's comments to the ITAR-Tass news agency came in response to an appeal by St Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak that Lenin's body be removed from display in its Red Square mausoleum and buried on January 21, the 71st anniversary of his death.

"The question of burying Lenin will be considered after the reburial of the remains of the Tsar's family," Filatov told ITAR-Tass.

Tsar Nicholas II and his family were secretly executed by Lenin's order in the Ural Mountains in 1918, soon after the Bolshevik Revolution.

222 foreign mercenaries killed in Kashmir since 1989

NEW DELHI, Nov 29: Pakistanis and Afghans top the number of foreign mercenaries fighting Indian rule in the disputed state of Kashmir, torn by a Muslim separatist drive since 1989, an official report said today, according to AFP.

The figures, released in the state winter capital Jammu, said 222 foreign Islamic rebels had been killed in clashes with Indian security forces between 1989 and October, 1994, of whom 97 were Pakistanis and 89 Afghans.

The Press Trust of India news agency said the other recorded deaths were of militants from Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen, who had come to aid the Kashmiri Muslim guerrillas in their campaign for secession.

Lankan flood leaves 4 lakh homeless

COLOMBO, Nov 29: Floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains at the weekend have left 400,000 people homeless in Sri Lanka's coastal Batticaloa district, relief officials said today, reports AFP.

The floodwaters have now begun to recede but most of the 83,000 families affected were undecided about returning to their villages immediately, officials said.

Thousands of people took shelter in temples and makeshift relief centres located on high ground after the floods ravaged about a dozen villages in Batticaloa, said social services director NWE Wijewantha.

"Our department is providing them with a week's supply of dry rations and cooked meals," Wijewantha said.

It is the second time in two weeks that the region has been hit by floods.

Fathers' names invented to conform to city norms

MOSCOW: Thousands of Moscow mothers invent names for the fathers of their newborn children to make the babies' birth certificates conform to city norms, Moskowsky Kommunist newspaper said yesterday, reports Reuter.

The paper said every fifth baby born in Moscow last year was illegitimate, up from 15 per cent three years ago. A third of the mothers of illegitimate children invented a name for the father.

Illegitimacy has risen in Russia as the strict moral codes of Soviet days gave way to a new era of permissiveness. Poor contraception and a lack of sex education mean more and more babies are born to young, unmarried women.

The article gave no figures for abortion, still the main form of birth control for millions of Russian women. Without high abortion rates, it said the figure for illegitimate births would be much higher.

Cousin slams Charles' lack of remorse

LONDON: A second cousin to Prince Charles has joined the list of royal grippers, slamming the heir to the British throne for his infidelities and ego, reports AP.

"He doesn't express any remorse for straying from his marital vows, no apologies to his family, his kids, even his wife," complained Marina Mowatt, 26th in line to the throne, in an interview published Monday.

Mowatt, who is daughter to Princess Alexandra, first cousin to Queen Elizabeth — and Charles' goddaughter to boot — told Hello! magazine that she thought Charles was a publicity hound.

"I just couldn't shrug off the feeling that the ... book (was) all part of Charles' concern for his popularity ratings more than any genuine concern for real people," the magazine Mowatt said.

Mowatt, 28, is no stranger to publicity herself. Dubbed the "royal rebel" for her 1990 wedding to a commoner when four months pregnant, she also earned 1991's "rear of the year" award proffered by a British jeans company.

Charles, 45, appeared in good spirits late Monday at London's Dominion Theater, where he met singers Tony Bennett, Shirley Bassey and other celebrities at the 67th annual Royal Variety Performance.

Iranian navy on full alert in the Gulf

TEHRAN, Nov 29: Iran's navy is "fully alert" over the presence of western forces in the Gulf and ready to defend itself in case of attack, a navy commander said in remarks published today, reports AFP.

Rear admiral Abbas Mohtaj, the navy's second-in-command, said 40 Iranian ships were "constantly monitoring the movement of foreign warships in the Persian Gulf."

"We are fully alert and are prepared to defend our territorial waters from foreign invasion," he said, quoted by the English daily Kayhan International today.

Since the end of the 1991 Gulf war, US, British and French forces have staged regular joint manoeuvres with Gulf Arab states.

US and British naval reinforcements were rushed to the Gulf waters after Iraq massed troops near the Kuwaiti border in early October, sparking

fears of a repeat of Baghdad's August 1990 invasion of the Emirate.

Iran has repeatedly warned against the presence of foreign forces in the region.

Mohtaj said meanwhile that Iran had spent around 10 billion dollars on defence in the past five years, a fraction of what the Gulf Arab states had spent over the same period.

Western media "often exaggerates over Iran's defence spending," he said.

Last week the rear admiral warned against "massive" procurement of arms by the Gulf monarchies.

Meanwhile, Washington and its Gulf Arab allies have expressed concern about Iran's arms buildup but Mohtaj said its arms spending was small compared with neighbouring Saudi Arabia which he said spent 130 billion on arms over the same period.



British Prime Minister John Major (L) welcomes Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to the Foreign Office on Monday in London. — AFP photo

Britain rejects Benazir's plea to support Bosnian Muslims

LONDON, Nov 29: Prime Minister John Major on Monday rejected an appeal from Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to intervene on behalf of Bosnia's Muslims or to supply them with arms, reports AP.

"The prime minister explained very frankly why he believed there could be no military solution to the conflict," a spokeswoman at Major's official Downing Street residence said.

"Lifting the arms embargo would only lead to an escalation of the conflict and jeopardise the humanitarian mission," said the spokeswoman, speaking in customary anonymity.

Bhutto, on her arrival Sunday for a weeklong visit to Britain, criticised Major's refusal to help arm the Muslim-led forces of the besieged Bosnian government.

"If the United Nations is not able to take military action to prevent Serbian aggression, at least it should allow the Bosnians the right to self-defence," she said.

Britain and France, the main contributors to UN forces in Bosnia, have resisted calls to increase NATO intervention and lift the arms embargo, arguing that such actions would escalate the conflict.

Pakistan, which also has troops on the ground in Bosnia, backs US calls to allow the Muslim-led army to achieve parity of munitions and

heavy weapons with its Bosnian Serb rivals.

Bhutto said she told Major in their 90-minute talks that her country was deeply concerned about Bosnia and urged tougher military action against the Serbs, especially besieged Bihac in northwest Bosnia, a supposed UN-designated "safe area" now on the verge of being overrun by Serb forces.

"Increased use of air power without adequate troops on the ground could not resolve anything or protect the civilian population," said a statement from Major's office in response.

Bhutto, who was educated at Oxford University, also discussed trade during her lunch with Major.



Princess of Wales (L), accompanied by Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing, president of the Children's Foundation, arrives at the Palace of Versailles, France on Monday to preside an international gala for children. The event was organised by UNESCO to raise money for children suffering from mistreatment. — AFP photo

Major saved from humiliating parliamentary defeat

LONDON, Nov 29: Prime Minister John Major was saved from humiliating defeat and a snap election by winning a key vote on Europe, but his parliamentary majority disappeared after a revolt by right-wingers in his Conservative Party reports Reuter.

Major hoped Finance Minister Kenneth Clarke could restore morale in his divided party by dangling the prospect of tax cuts in Tuesday's annual budget.

Clarke led the government fight in parliament on Monday night to ram through a bill which increased Britain's contributions to the European Union.

The government, deeply unpopular with voters, had threatened to call an election if it was defeated, which would almost certainly have ended the Conservatives' 15 year hold on power.

The strong ram tactics worked — Major had a comfortable majority of 33 votes — but eight Conservative members of parliament registered their resentment at handing more cash to Brussels by abstaining from the vote.

The expulsion of the rebels is testimony to the desperate tactics Major is having to use to keep a semblance of control over his fractious party, divided to the core over Europe.

Losing his majority need not spell in the end for Major after four years as prime minister because the dissidents normally vote with the government on issues other than Europe.

But he will face a challenge every bit as tough as Monday's Euro-budget vote when the opposition Labour Party tables a motion next Tuesday seeking to block an increase in value added tax (VAT) on domestic fuel, due to take effect next April.

Another Eurosceptic MP, Sir Richard Body, voluntarily resigned to the whip.

of Eurosceptics could spill over into a formal challenge to Major's leadership of the party.

The deadline for nominations is midway on Wednesday. Major is hoping that Chancellor of the Exchequer Clarke, his most likely successor, will be able to ease the pressure by producing a reassuring budget.

Clarke long ago ruled out the tax cuts demanded by Conservative right-wingers nervous about Labour's 25-point lead in opinion polls, indeed he has insisted on going ahead with the increase in VAT on fuel.

But with the rapidly expanding British economy spinning off greater than expected tax revenues, and with docile inflation holding down the government's outlays, Clarke

is likely to project a big drop in the government's budget deficit.

Instead of the government's current forecast of 28 billion pounds (43.8 billion dollar) in 1995/96, some economists believe Clarke could pencil in a deficit closer to 20 billion pounds (31.3 billion dollars).

If he can point to a balanced budget by 1997-98, Conservative MPs will almost certainly be able to count on tax cuts to restore the party's dismal political fortunes in time for the next election, which must be held by April 1997.

But even the glittering prize of tax cuts might not be enough to stop tension over Europe from tearing the Conservatives apart.

Clarke's predecessor Norman Lamont, warned in Monday's debate that Europe could still split the Conservatives as under and said the party should consider all alternatives — including withdrawal from the European Union.

Another Conservative Eurosceptic, John Wilkinson, said: "To me, for the Conservative Party this is as climatic a moment as when the anti-appeasers stood their ground over Munich in 1938."

He added: "It seems to me that the government bows down and appeases Brussels all the way along the line. And the danger is that, like Neville Chamberlain (prime minister in 1938), Major will be swept away from office."